

## • Moving Forward ...

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“Voc Rehab has ... opened the doors to a lot of opportunities for me.”

the future. The knowledge that someone is always there to represent them if problems arise can be a great comfort as well.

Through this program, Jenny met Employment Specialist Dave Jelinek. He is with the Grand Island office of Voc Rehab. Dave’s experience with Jenny was extremely positive. “She was very responsible,” he noted. “I’ve grown to know her and her family very well.”

Dave helped with education planning, and was available to address any other concerns. As Jenny prepared for college, Dave offered advice and tools to help her get there. In addition to finding a school that would allow Jenny to meet her academic goals, they needed to find a place that could accommodate her physical requirements. She didn’t have to look far.

Hastings College offered the environment she needed. Dave was impressed by the college’s willingness to accommodate Jenny. While it took a little time to determine just what she wanted, today she is confident that she made the right decision. “I changed my major three times,” she noted. “I ended up in Psychology.”

After college graduation, Voc Rehab assisted Jenny with the job search. Dave was confident that she would be successful when an opportunity at HHS presented itself. “They told me that it was available and I did the rest,” she remembered. After she accepted the position, Voc Rehab also helped to coordinate modifications to make her new worksite usable.

While the job can be stressful, she enjoys it. “Unfortunately, a portion of the individuals who call are in crisis situations, so you have to

know how to handle that and be ready for just about anything, she said.” And so she is.

Today Jenny says, “I’m headed in the right direction.” While not having a means of independent transportation can be frustrating, it hasn’t kept her from moving ahead. “I just recently moved out on my own,” she said. “It’s very exciting.”

Jenny’s clear, level-headed thinking, her drive, work ethic and positive attitude all had a hand in her accomplishment. She also credits her family for their never-failing support. Finally, she said of Voc Rehab, “Voc Rehab has helped me realize my goals and aspirations. They have helped me to achieve independence through making me aware of resources that I did not realize were available before. They’ve opened the doors to a lot of opportunities for me.”

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# Quality Employment Solutions®

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Nebraska Department of Education

ISSUE 61

» Jenny Keown

## Moving Forward

“I don’t let the grass grow under my wheels,” was the eloquent expression Jenny Keown used to describe her outlook on life. Her intelligence and sense of humor serve her well in her position at Health and Human Services in Grand Island. Jenny is a case aide and the first contact for people who wish to apply for food stamps, Medicaid, energy assistance and other economic assistance. Jenny’s experiences have perfectly prepared her for

this job. She knows what it takes to get things done. “I have a very mild form of Cerebral Palsy,” she mentioned. “I don’t let it stop me.”

As a high school student, Jenny’s family and school involved her with Vocational Rehabilitation’s (Voc Rehab) Transition Program. Just as the term implies, this program helps students who experience disabilities transition into a college environment, employment, or wherever else life may take them after high school. A collaborative effort between the family, school and Voc Rehab makes this possible. Parents and students can learn invaluable information about resources in the community that are specifically designed to help them. Learning strengths and weaknesses early is also wonderful, as it allows families to anticipate problems and prepare for

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» Kevin Paxton Hickenbottom

## Employment Options

“I’m a kitchen worker. I help with making pizzas, doing dishes, stuff like that.” Kevin Paxton Hickenbottom is talking about his job at Godfather’s Pizza with well-earned pride. He has worked hard to reach this important goal. “I have ADHD and Bipolar,” he explained. Both conditions can make finding employment and other aspects of independent living extremely difficult. Not to be intimidated however, Kevin sought the support of Lincoln’s Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) at the recommendation of his family and friends.

Tammy Laird, an Employment Specialist at Voc Rehab, worked with Kevin to prepare him for a job. He remembers “...some testing to see how I could handle work situations.” Tammy talked about her first favorable impression of him, saying, “Kevin struck me as someone really enthusiastic and willing to please and was very serious about his job search.” They discussed his strengths, and the areas in which he needed to improve. Further testing helped determine possible job matches. “She helped me fill out an application,” Kevin said. Tammy recalled how willing Kevin was to take advice and put himself out there. “He wanted to be a cook,” she said. And so the job search began.

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# The Road Back



John Swerczek

**“Now, nearly 20 years later, John speaks about the dramatic incident as one who knows he is fortunate to be alive.”**

“It was a pretty bad deal for a while. I was plum out for 13 days,” John Swerczek remembered as he described the accident that would shape the rest of his life. Now, nearly 20 years later, John speaks about the dramatic incident as one who knows he is fortunate to be alive. “After I came to, I had to learn everything again. I couldn’t even walk.” During the accident that caused such devastation, John suffered a severe blow to the head. The trauma caused clotting in his brain. Quick thinking and a risky operation were necessary to save his life.

As John recovered he realized that many activities, such as finding and holding jobs, would be difficult. Years passed before he found the help he needed. Eventually, John began working with Workforce Development. They referred him to Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) in Columbus. When Voc Rehab met John, they knew that he would be a wonderful candidate for their services. “He is a really neat person,” remarked Employment Specialist Jill Vasina. Voc Rehab knew they could help him better define his strengths and weaknesses, and use their resources to pair him with prospective employers.

They can also work to improve areas of weakness. For instance, Voc Rehab can offer assistance with resumes, interviewing, typing skills, hygiene, and many other important factors to consider when seeking employment. John appreciated the help Voc Rehab provided to sort his options. It allowed him to decide what was really important to him in a job.

Jill Vasina remembered some of John’s obstacles. One area of concern was his memory. “John has a hard time keeping track of little details...” To help him, Voc Rehab and Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) worked together to obtain a DayMinder for John to help him remember everything from appointments to taking medications.

With the support of Voc Rehab, John began applying for jobs. Before long, he had an interview with Nebraska Pork Partners. Ultimately, they offered him the position. John couldn’t let the opportunity slip away, and he accepted. Not only does the job meet his personal standards, it is close to home - a luxury he was grateful for after commuting

nearly 30 miles a day for his previous job. Another persuasive factor was that Nebraska Pork Partners raises hogs, an industry with which John was already familiar.

After John landed the position, Voc Rehab and Rainbow Center, Inc. helped him maintain it. “Voc Rehab and Rainbow Center worked together in a partnership,” Jill said. Rainbow Center is a day rehab center that also provides supported employment services. Sandy Carlson is the specialist who works with John at Rainbow Center. Jill has only good things to say about them. In spite of the challenges he copes with daily, Jill said, “Through her coaching, he’s really been able to talk with Sandy and handle it.”

Today, it is apparent that the combined efforts of all of these wonderful agencies have culminated in success. John will soon begin his third year at Nebraska Pork Partners. Jill stated, “He’s doing very well.” She knows, however, that it takes more than the help of agencies like Voc Rehab to create a success story like John’s. “He was the one who wanted to make it work, so he was very successful and I think he’ll continue to be in the future.” John, in turn, recognizes the importance of a strong support system and said, “They never had a negative attitude. They were very good to me.”

## • The Rest of the Story •

**Chuck Colclasure, featured in Issue 60 of *Quality Employment Solutions*, attended Central Community College (CCC) for 3 1/2 years prior transferring to University of Nebraska at Kearney. Chuck co-chaired (with Nick Freeland) the golf tournament mentioned in the story for the benefit the General Scholarship Fund at CCC.**

## • Employment Options ...

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Together they discussed obstacles like transportation. Kevin does not drive and so needed to work close to home or find another reliable and affordable way to get to work. They considered their options carefully. One of the wonderful things Voc Rehab can offer is contacts. Employment Specialists are well-connected in their areas and therefore often know employers personally. Voc Rehab made an initial phone call to Godfather’s Pizza on Kevin’s behalf. Then he submitted an application for an available position. After a while, Tammy encouraged Kevin to call Godfathers. “He made the follow-up phone call himself,” she remembered. “He was very assertive about his job search.” Tammy wasn’t finished working for Kevin, “After that I followed up with a phone call.”

Tammy was encouraged by the open and forthright discussion she had with Godfather’s and was excited to establish a new employer contact.

Kevin was granted an interview and asked Tammy to be present. She met with Chris Bogus, the General Manager at Godfather’s, prior to the interview. Tammy was extremely impressed with Chris and said, “He was enthusiastic about this idea. I could tell he thought it was an opportunity to diversify his workforce.” At the actual interview Tammy

sat back and let Kevin run the show. “Kevin did a great job. He presented himself well.” The two had practiced for this moment by doing mock interviews. The practice paid off, and Kevin landed the job.

Kevin is learning new job skills daily. His Manager Chris said, “He has made improvements on everything I’ve asked him to do.” A patient person who looks out for the welfare of his employees, Chris’s guideline for Kevin is, “Always think, are you making a difference?” The job is enriching Kevin’s personal life as well. He has become very social... something that used to be tough for him.

Voc Rehab continues to work with Godfather’s to ensure that both employer and employee are satisfied. Tammy believes that Chris is “... committed to

Kevin as an employee and a young person.” It is valuable for both Chris and Kevin to have someone to whom they can take their concerns.

Kevin would still like to become a cook one day. He continues to work toward his goals and has realistic expectations, “I’d like to work at Godfather’s a while longer, and possibly, if I can, become a shift manager,” he said. In the meantime, to show his appreciation to Voc Rehab, Kevin drops by occasionally with goodies. Tammy summed it up saying, “He’s looking forward to his future and thinking about his future like any young man would. He’s excited about life I think.”

Kevin Paxton Hickenbottom

